May 17 2000   Montanian

Rainy Creek Road to close during asbestos cleanup

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency asked Lincoln County and Kootenai National Forest to close Rainy Creek Road from June 15 through Aug. 30 because dump trucks will be making several thousand trips up and down the road during that time. County and forest representatives agreed to the request.

The closure will be Mondays through Saturdays, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., from Hwy. 37 to Forest Road 401, about five miles.

EPA wants to close the road to public traffic because dump trucks will be hauling asbestos-contaminated soil up the road to the former W.R. Grace vermiculite mine. The contaminated soil will be removed from two sites, one at the former Grace vermiculite screening plant (currently Raintree Nursery) located on Hwy. 37 at Rainy Creek Road, and the other at the former expanding plant in Libby next to the railroad tracks and ball fields (currently Millwork West).

Paul Peronard, EPA's on-scene coordinator overseeing the cleanup of asbestos contamination in Libby, made the request last week. Peronard said May 11 that he expects about 4,000 dump-truck loads from the Raintree site and 1,500 loads from the Millwork West site.

The contaminated soil will be hauled back to the site of the former vermiculite mine that operated for almost 70 years. Grace owned and operated the mine from 1963 to 1990.

Lincoln County Commissioner Rita Windom and Forest Supervisor Bob Castaneda said in a press release they agree that the dump trucks on Rainy Creek Road would present a public safety hazard and they approved the temporary closure last week. The road will be open to the public on weekdays between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., and on Sundays

"The inconvenience to the public is unfortunate, however, it is important to help the EPA complete the clean-up as soon as possible," Castaneda said.

Peronard said the cleanup will be done by Marcorps, a national contractor. Peronard said the job will employ about 35 people, including 29 locally hired people and six from outside the area.